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A RIBAND ON MY REIN

A Riband on My Rein

POEMS BY NANCY BYRD TURNER

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

EDWIN VALENTINE MITCHELL, INC.

1930

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To My Friends

MABEL JOHNSON *and* ELEANOR JOHNSON WALKER

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A RIBAND ON MY REIN

I

HILLS

"BEHOLD, THIS DREAMER!"

A BALLAD OF BLAKE AT PECKHAM RYE

They had sent him trudging to Peckham Rye,
Small and smudgy and errand-bent,
When—high on a hilltop in a tree,
A storm of angels, their wings besprent
With snow and fire, as wonder wove
Leaf over leaf! He could not move. . . .
And was beaten for it. Then, while he smarted,
Lo, in a harvest field of June,
Michael Archangel, eager-hearted,
Gathering sheaves in the high, hot noon—
The blades and barbs of the burnished wheat
Shining to Heaven amid the heat,
The scattered grain of the common oat
Lodged like pearls on his windy coat,
The same clear loveliness flashing high
That burned on the boughs at Peckham Rye!

But it's prison for dreamers. Soon a bar
Grates at their windows. They measure day

By the thin gold edge of the evening star.
The shadows of leaves along their floor
Have the shape of wings; in the twilight door
The dusty jailer is like to wear
An instant aureole in his hair.
When agues of beauty rack the bones,
A pillow of straw and a couch of stones;
For hunger by day and thirst by night,
The bread and water of pure delight.
There is that for dreams.
When you trudge, some day,
To do your errand in London town,
Keep well to the trail of the beaten way;
Beware of the hills. And hurry by,
Crossing your fingers and looking down,
At Peckham Rye.

INCIDENT

A crumb of crystal left its ancient ledge
And fell. The sun that stood at Ajalon
Had burned it amber clear; old frosts of dawn
Had shaped its beauty, angle and chiselled edge.

Falling, it stirred the sea and all the stars:
A long tide washing Egypt was aware;
Unspoken islands knew, and the cold air
Between the worlds; and Mercury knew, and Mars.

Through widening courts of space the rumor passed,
Year after year—echoes of echoes thinned
To less than sound, until Orion heard;
And when the pebble was dust of time at last,
And scattered long ago down an old wind,
The outposts of the Pleiades had word.

WHO MAKES A GARDEN

Who rears four walls around a little plot,
  Some still, secluded spot,
And digs and sows therein, has done a thing
  Beyond his reckoning.
In one small, fended space
Beauty and deep, untellable content
  Make their abiding-place,
And measureless peace is pent.
There time takes note of tender happenings:
The shimmer of a butterfly's blue wings
  Above the clustered phlox;
A spider's will to work a miracle
  Between two hollyhocks;
A hidden cricket's humble prophecies,
A brown bird by a pool, and all that goes
Into the lovely lifetime of a rose;
A pansy's lore, and little questing bees'
  Strange, sweet biographies.

Who makes a garden plans beyond his knowing.
Old roads are lost, old dwellings have their day,

And he himself, far summoned, passes hence
An unfamiliar way;—
But lo, he has not perished with his going!
For, year by year, as April's heart is stirred,
Spring after punctual spring,
Across the little acre's wintry gray
Comes, slowly traced, an old, authentic word
In radiant lettering;
A shining script of tendril, vine, and whorl—
New green, pale gold, clear lavender, and pearl,
Petal by delicate petal, leaf by leaf. . . .

As though his own hand, from the Mystery
Wrote, for all earth to see,
Upon a beauteous, living scroll his brief
For immortality.

A BALLAD OF OLD SEERS

A word of dreamers and their dreams,
That strange old brotherhood of seers:
One thought he saw a flaming bush,
It set him wandering forty years;
Another had a brain a-teem
With visions, vague and slow of wit;
His brothers put him in a pit
And let him languish with his dream.

There was a graybeard; year by year
He meddled with the secret stars
And stretched his chains to gape and peer
At heaven through his prison bars.
There was a simple weaver's son
Who held one hope in such esteem
He crossed cold seas of doubt to find
A dim land charted in a dream.

And then that solemn seer who caught
A shining dream of bondmen freed,
And gave his heart to one great need,
And perished even while he wrought;

And that slim girl who saw the gleam,
The old delusion and desire—
Her body made a bright bonfire;
Fagots of beauty fed her dream.

A voice cried in the wilderness;
The king's sword drew and smote it still.
A calm young Prophet pressed to meet
Slow death upon a desolate hill,
Dark, shameful death, and scorned to yield
For any anguish. Nay, it seems
Not even sharp reality
Can loose these dreamers from their dreams.

But even while we scorn and scheme
We know the worth of all their tears.
Lord of the everlasting years,
Guard thou each dreamer and his dream!

"AROUND GOLGOTHA LIE SKULLS OF MANY SIZES"

Iscariot's skull has never bleached alone.
(The lids were weighed with silver, for they stared—
Marked coins not even the boldest beggar dared
To filch.) A hundred other skulls lie thrown
This way and that, haphazard, and ogle his own:
A rebel's; a thief's; a forthright murderer's
Who deftly killed his paramour,—and hers,
Delicate, cleft along the temple bone;—

And narrow, witless shapes, by old rain thinned
To mottled ivory; and skulls so small
One pitying palm could stretch to cup them all.
So they lie neighborly. But when a wind
Makes down, cold Aprils, from one desolate height,
That which was Judas rattles in the night.

ETCHING: NOVEMBER

The land is gray as the riftless sky,
The sky as wan as the huddled sedge
Leaning, plume inward, wearily;

Sharp by the roadside a stricken hedge,
Drab on the skyline a naked tree;
A few flowers faint by the marsh's edge.

Leaves on the marsh are sad asleep,
No wind or ripple to bid them wake,
Leaves in the hollows, heap on heap.

If a twig should stir, or a bare vine shake,
Or a light breath go where the sedge is deep,
The earth's old heart would break.

TWELVE GOOD MEN AND TRUE

The rusty key has whined in the lock, the rickety door
is fast;
They are shut inside with their irksome job, left to themselves at last.
A dozen chairs, and a rough deal board, and a curtain
hung askew—
And here they'll bide till they can decide, the twelve
good men and true.

A prisoned bee in the hot light hums at the crack of a
window pane,
His low monotonous mumble set to a garrulous grim
refrain—
"Guilty or not?" "Guilty or not?" The heavy hours
lurch by.
They nick the table with idle knives, and shift their
quids, and sigh.

Aeons gone, when the new-turned world rolled to the
brink of space,
Out of a storm of star-dust hurled to its appointed
place—

The great Lord God that fashioned it spake in the Trinity.

(Surely a thunder shook the skies.) Let Us make man, said He.

Up in the dusty jury room the frantic bee falls dumb;
A yawning watcher seals its doom with the flick of a calloused thumb.
"Guilty or not?" "Guilty or not?" They fidget with their trust—
A freeman soon, or, in a moon, a dangling sack of dust?

Eleven in line; one lagging back, an old saw in his head,
Let Us make man, let Us make man . . . something the Lord God said.
Scrape of a chair, thump of a boot; he feels for his hat with a frown;
"Have it your way, I've said my say. Look ye, the sun is down!"

Aeons gone, with His own strong hands and by His own strange plan,
Back in the red, dim dawn of time, brooding, He made Him man,

In His own splendid image wrought; then, when the frame was whole,
Breathed in his nostrils the breath of life, and lo, a living soul!

The rusty key has groaned in the lock, a scuffling tread's on the stair;
The wise judge offers his waiting ear. His words drop slow and spare:
"Hanged by the neck till dead," speaks he. Make way and let them through—
They're tired, now, and they want their tea, the twelve good men and true!

HILLS

Men climb tall hills to suffer and die—
This is a truth as old as the race:
Blinded with awe on Sinai,
Bowed to the wind on Horeb place,
Lone on Pisgah and Calvary . . .
So, through the ages, God knows why,
Men climb lone hills to suffer and die.

TO WORDSWORTH

My heart has chosen a poet for every mood—
Peace and despair and tenderness and mirth,
And the unrest that hath no name on earth;
But thou art with me in that solitude
When first the year comes to its autumnhood;
When the old world hangs poised among the spheres,
And a spirit too still for joy, too fair for tears
Broods gently over wistful field and wood.

I smile above thy pages in the sun;
A butterfly is shadowed on the leaf,
A droning bee-song sounds a viol-string;
The little flowers have faces, every one,
And from their eyes my life's profoundest grief
Looks sweetly out, a harmless, hurtless thing.

JOHN MASEFIELD

I think he did not learn his wisdom slowly
But, faring down like Paul one sordid day
To some old grim Damascus, in the way
Beheld his challenging Angel, stark and holy;
And knew reality—an instant hurled
Into the humble dust, then suddenly
A sealed apostle with one word to cry
Down all the lanes and highways of the world:

Beauty, a text for living and for dying,
A light behind all dark, a wonder wrought
On common things, a glory and a power;
Beauty, a gospel that he will be crying
Till even the farthest alien shall have caught
The flame of that apocalyptic hour.

KING DAVID

I. Bathsheba

The King stood graved against the sunset sky
And watched across red roofs the limpid play
Of water cool on candid flesh, the spray
That silvered tender curve and delicate thigh.

Dusk fell; he paced the wall and could not rest;
Judah, his heart's inheritance, and old
Proud Israel and his honor shrivelled to cold
Thin shadows, and an edged flame burned his breast.

"A soldier's wife," his courtiers brought him word.
He slept; but sleep, a swift, dark shuttle, threw
All night two tangled threads, and wove apace
Into one endless pattern, bright and blurred,
Two dreams: a slim white flower fair with dew,
And dust upon a dead man's trampled face.

II. Before Nathan

The King said, "Speak." And Nathan's somber gaze
Held him a moment, darkening; then he spoke

Slow word by word, till David's anger broke,
Vowing hot vengeance by his holy race.

"Ay," Nathan said again, "that man possessed
Treasure and power and fame; one lamb was all
The neighbor's heritage . . . she knew his call,
And followed him, and sheltered in his breast."

Then, as the King's oath rang, "The man shall die!"
He felt Bathsheba's body against his heart,
Her breath upon his cheek. A tremor ran
Through brain and blanching blood. And suddenly,
One flash before the prophet's terrible dart
Was loosed, his own soul stabbed: *Thou art the man!*

A SLIM YOUTH CALLED SHELLEY

—HOGG'S DIARY

His name was Hogg. North countryman, he came
Stodgy and staid, to learn at Oxford town,
But studied most to have his muffins brown,
His bitter tea well brewed, and blinked at fame;
Nor dimly dreamed his shabby door would frame
A bright impetuous angel, that his hearth,
Ashen, unkempt, would kindle for all the earth
And all the winds of time a quenchless flame.

Yet often, as the hour drew late and stark,
He saw his threshold tremble, sudden alight. . . .
And wrote, heart-shaken, when the years grew chill:
"I used to hear him running in the dark
Across the old quadrangles, through the night" . . .
Adding, "I seem to hear those footsteps still."

A STATUE OF WASHINGTON, IN THE NORTH

Valiant he rides, here where the spring comes slow,
Keen etched against our gusty April gray,
East wind at stalwart shoulder, bitter spray
Of sea-wrought mist on rein and saddle bow;
And while the old intrepid hoofbeats go
Along the listening ages, if the face,
Weary with wars, be set a little space
Southwestward, fain and wistful, even so. . . .

That way lies boyhood. Through a scented rain
Of apple blooms at dusk the whippoorwills
Are haling truants from the Stafford hills,
And hares go romping down an old red lane,
And minnows fleck the Rappahannock tide
With taunting silver tails.

Ride, Soldier, ride!

II

PLANTATION RHYMES

SCARING THE HAWK

De hock come cleavin' down de hot blue sky.
Wheeee! Wheee!
He cotch yo' las' chicken ef you don't look spry,
Wheeee! Wheeee! Wheeee!
Run to a creek flowin' eas' and wes'—
Dis-a-way, dat-a-way, eas' an' wes';
Choose out a rock what de water done press,
Wild, wild water what never do res',
Dis-a-way, dat-a-way, never kin res'.

Wheeee! Wheeeee! Listen to de hock!
Lope back home wid yo' holy rock,
Chuck it in de fireplace, firm an' flat—
An' old Mr. Hock got to stay whar he at;
Kase he feared of a rock what de water done press,
Stark cold water makin' dis-a-way, dat-a-way,
Swif' blue water what never kin res'.

Wheeee! Wheeeee! Holler on, hock,
You cain't steal chickens pas', a water-charmed rock,

Water flowin' dat-a-way, dis-a-way, dat-a-way,
Cla'r, clean water what never kin res'.
You feared of a rock what de water done bless.
Whee on, Mr. Hock!

SHOUTING SUN

Early Easter mornin',
When de earth's mighty still,
De sun come a-stridin'
Up de aidge of de hill.

Hail and hallelujer!
De big sun cry,
Dat good Lawd Jesus,
He ain't never die!
De good Lawd Jesus
Done riz from de dead
Lak he said, lak he said!

Early Easter mornin'
When de earth all still,
De sun come a-shoutin',
Come a-r'arin' an' a-shoutin',
An' holler *Hallelujer!*
From de top of de hill.

KILDEER BIRD

De kildeer holler t'roo de livelong night,
Kildee, kildee!
He turn smack foolish when de moon shine bright,
Kildee, kildee!
Down in de lowgrounds an' up on de hill
He run like a lizard, an' he don't keep still;
He don't keep still kase he ain't got a min' to,
He cyant sleep hisself, so ain't nobody gwine to.
Kildee, kildee, screechin' dat tune
In de light of de moon!

De only thing to do when de kildee holler
Kildee, kildee!
Am to snatch on yo' shoe an' foller, foller, foller,
Kildee, kildee!
Ef you once kin cotch him by de aidge of his tail
An' yank out a feather, den his power gwine fail.
But he run like de debble kase he jes' got a min' to—
He cyant sleep hisself, an' ain't nobody gwine to.
Kildee, kildee, crazy as a loon
At de full of de moon!

JAY BIRDS GO TO HELL ON FRIDAY

Jay birds, dey goes to hell on Friday.
Why dey goes, how dey goes, don't nobody know.
Dey settles in de treetops early Friday mornin',
Jay! jay! jay! jay!
Den dey takes to deir wings widout a bit o' warnin'.
Whar you flyin' jay birds, a-flyin' so low?
Jay! jay! jay! jay!
(Somepin done call 'em, and dey bleeged for to go.)

De jay birds gits back from hell on Sunday.
When dey comes, how dey comes, cyan't nobody tell.
Dey screeches in de treetops early Sunday mornin',
Jay! jay! jay! jay!
Dey rackets in de treetops jes' as day is dawnin'.
What you sayin', jay birds? What you see in hell?
Jay! jay! jay! jay!
(Dey knows mighty p'inted, but dey plumb cyan't tell.)

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GO TO SLEEP CHILE

Go to sleep, chile,
Shet yo' eyes, chile!
De day cyan't come
Till de night las' a while.

Shadders in de woods,
Wind stopped still,
Mus'mellon moon
Drappin' down 'cross de hill;

Cricket in de bush
Fiddle, fiddle, fiddle;
Tree toad in de tree
Sayin' triddle, triddle, triddle.

Tree toad triddle
An' he cyan't shet his mouf—
He callin' for a rain
In de long, long drouf';

Cricket fiddle on
Till by and bye

He play dat moon
Plumb out'n dat sky.

Shet yo' eyes, chile,
Go to sleep, chile!
De dawn cyan't break
Till de dark been a while.
Go to sleep, chile.

OLD MISS POLECAT

Old Miss Polecat switch down de road,
A-steppin' and a-mincin';
She don't look to right, she don't look to lef',
She keep straight on, sartain sure of herse'f—
An' she mighty cornvincin'.

Young Mr. Hound come a-spankin' along,
As brash as a b'ar;
He sniff at de wrong wind, a-turnin' de corner,
Don't see Miss Pole till he right smack on her,
Den—he jes' ain't dar!

Old Miss Polecat push down de road,
A-steppin' and a-mincin'.
She got grand manners when she feelin' mild;
But whedder she cyalm or whedder she riled,
She mighty cornvincin'!

BLACK CAT

Don't never take a road what a black cat cross—
'T ain't nothin' but sorrow, 't ain't nothin' but loss.
Brindle cat, spotted cat, dem's all right;
Safety in a yaller cat, blessin' in a white;
But de black cat ructious, wid a bristle in his tail,
He fotchin' for de Debble, and he better not fail.
De black cat travel wid his belly in de dus';
He gwine whar he gwine, and he gwine 'kase he mus'.
Black cat, black cat—when he cross yo' track,
No matter whar you gwine,
To a dippin' or a dyin',
No matter whar you hurryin'—
To a marryin' or a buryin'—
You better turn back!

MORE RAIN, MORE REST

De rain been a-rainin' for a week an' mo';
It splarshin' in de gutter, it sousin' at de do';
It mumble at de winder, it bumble on de eaves,
It make long steppin's in de honeyshuck leaves.
We cyan't bug 'taters, and we cyan't thin corn;
Dar's gwine to be a famine, jes' as sure as you born;
Dar's bleeged to be a famine, no mo', no less—
But de Lawd boss de weather, an' de Lawd know bes'—
    Mo' rain, mo' res' . . .
    Mo' rain, mo' res'.

Old Mr. Crow got de croup in his ches',
Old Mrs. Turkey Hen a-drowndin' on her nes';
Rain, rain, rain, an' de rank weeds growin'—
Dar cyan't be no harvest whar dar ain't been no hoein'.
But de sweet water drummin': No use for to fret,
Set peaceful in de cabin while you got a chance to set;
De Lawd sen' de rain, an' de Lawd know bes',
Set right on you backbone an' let de Lawd bless—
    Mo' rain, mo' res' . . .
    Mo' rain, mo' res'.

III

TRUNDLE BED TRASH

BRANDED

At four I had a bumptious way about me,
Was prone to strut and brag a little; hence
The neighbors' freckled boy was moved to flout me:
"Trundle bed trash!" he flung across the fence.
It brought me to the dust. Ah, truth that hurts!
And past denying how, night by humble night,
My small bed crept from under the big bed's skirts
And drew me in at verge of candle-light.

Trundle bed trash! When all the dark disgrace
Was known to Mother, she bent above my sorrow.
"Trundle bed treasure—tell him that tomorrow!"
Her lovely hair against my wretched face.
And so I laid me down in the poor bed,
Not all convinced, but somehow comforted.

ADVENTURE

I sallied out to count the stars one night:
Great Bear bestrode the barn; a new star nicked
Our ridge-pole, and the weather vane had pricked
A cluster, while the winter boughs were bright
With magic apples. Ah, but where was I?
Slow, as I gazed, my little being was drawn
Outward and up, far summoned on and on
Into the terrible crystal of the sky,

Till planets loomed like worlds; the lonely earth
Paled like a dwindling star; wide, awful spaces
Tingled with beauty. Heart could bear no more;
Sobbing, I fled. O fair the shabby hearth
At home, and dear my dolls' familiar faces,
And sweet the firelight on the nursery floor!

DUSK

Sometimes at evening prayer the light burned dim;
But Father did not mind. His way was plain
Through psalm and gospel as our orchard lane,
And dusk could make no difference to him.
Clear in the gloom rang deeds of holy men,
Five little faces lifted to the Word
Till, "Let us pray!"—a solemn bustle, and then
Five little backs bowed low before the Lord.

Often he prayed so near to bedtime hour
That very faint the last Amen would fall,
The baby crumpled like a folding flower,
Myself a nodding shadow on the wall,
And, at the edge of all the mysteries,
May Agnes, sleeping on her sinless knees.

HONEY

They haled me from the nursery to astound
My young aunt's preacher beau with Bible lore.
I mentioned all the patriarchs (I was four),
And then they asked what valiant Sampson found
In the strong lion. I said, though well aware,
"He found intestines." Nay, I stooped to use
A shorter, uglier word no lady would choose;
It echoed on the pure, defenceless air.

Dimly today I recollect my hasty
Retreat, my pink aunt wilting in her place,
My perfect knowledge that I had been nasty,
And most of all the lean young parson's face,
His proper, hard-held mouth, the agonies
Of laughter in his apostolic eyes.

ENCOUNTER

The cook told creepy yarns until one day
Our Francie shrilled to see a ghost go by
Full tilt; and gooseflesh pricked us, hip and thigh,
And loud we shrieked upon the king's highway.
But when we rallied and strove to nail the lie,
Not till the third degree she weakened, and said
The thing had longish ears, a furry head,
A puff-ball tail, and one bright, awful eye.

The more we cross-examined, the more she seethed
With pompous pride. To passers who would hear it
The lurid tale was told. May Agnes breathed:
"Perhaps it was a baby rabbit's spirit. . ."
But Francie, swaggering home, mouthed the large boast
That, single-handed, she had scared a ghost.

BARBEE

Barbee was part of life itself; we could
Not picture earth without her. Dear she moved
Around our home and worked and sang and loved,
Kin of our very selves in all but blood,
And somehow found a balm for every hurt,
And some way made the hardest duty shine—
Our fireside saint, too busy for a shrine,
Our guardian angel in a gingham skirt.

Barbee had seen us each into the world,
From first to last. No faintest doubt was mine
That, when the fearsome Judgment skies unfurled,
Barbee herself would give the countersign
To Gabriel, and calm, undaunted even
By plunging planets, see us into Heaven.

BRAND FROM THE BURNING

A bad boy whipped my puppy. At the sight
Earth rocked, the stars went on a mad rampage,
And in one direful hour of utter rage
I almost wrecked our simple hearth outright.
My words were brimstone and my tears were gall.
"I wish the devil had him!" So at last
The climax burst, all bounds of breeding past,
And hell no farther than our own front hall.

To Mother I seemed a changeling, loosed among
Her small, shocked children. Father's head was bent,
Weighing the problem of my punishment.
But into Barbee's open arms I flung,
And on that breast so warm, so wide, so deep,
Still breathing curses, sobbed myself to sleep.

EXPERIENCE

Once I came home at sunset, that sad hour,
And could not find my mother anywhere.
Darkly remembering witches and their power,
I thought, "She is charmed, she is gone!" And in
despair,
All over the place, my voice at dolorous pitch,
Went crying to Heaven the lost, beloved name—
Till lo, around a sudden corner she came,
Uncharmed, unharmed, and with a willow switch.

Seeing her safe repaid for any hurt.
I kissed the rod, then, chastened, crept beneath
The porch, and mused on things of life and death,
And watched my slow tears dripping in the dirt—
Noting at length, with wet, regardful eyes,
A splendid chance for chocolate mud pies.

NIGHTFALL

The trundle bed was soft. I used to lie
And watch my mother, young and very fair,
The firelight magic on her braided hair,
Rocking the baby with a lullaby.
And O, her song was like a falling stream
Led down from lovely uplands, on and on,
Until my folded heart, resistless drawn,
Shook out a little silken sail of dream,

And followed with the current, slanting past
High-towered hilltops, violet banks of Spring,
Old cottonfields and woods and valleys deep,
Dimly to level reaches . . . stayed, at last,
In wide, still water spent with journeying,
The shallows of the meadow lands of Sleep.

IV

SOLILOQUIES AND OTHERS

THREE SOLILOQUIES

I. A Pekinese Dog

My great grandfather for his daily diet
Had leg of holy leopard, and he bit
A foreign devil at sight; but here I sit,
Lodged on an ample lap in frowsy quiet,
Or tethered tight to apronstrings I pace,
Full of frustrations, scarce allowed to swerve
Beyond one skirt-hem—even to observe
The immemorial rituals of my race.

In the blue shadow of great China Wall
Two thousand years, to sound of temple bells,
My grave ancestors trod imperial.
This lady with the leash untiring tells
About *her* tribal rock—three centuries
Of age. Great Buddha, stay me lest I sneeze!

II. *Mephitis Mephitica* (Common Skunk)

There's much in personality, I know—
Else why should I, frail-built and plainly furred,

As simple in my habits as a bird,
Affect and overawe my fellows so?
Dogs and the family cat (my cousin) greet
Me shyly; meaching wood folk clear my path;
And even the farmer's bull, that child of wrath,
Bows and has business elsewhere when we meet.

As for the genus Man, I have him cowed.
I'd like to turn my aura on a range
Of good old dinosaurs, just for a change,
And move them as I move this modern crowd—
This reverential crew I daily see
Swayed by the strong, instinctive sense of ME.

III. An Alley Cat

Mangy and gaunt I walk the tiles tonight,
And mangy comes my lady to her tryst;
But nine lives back (nine hundred, some have guessed)
With prouder mien we rambled, ranging light.
Sacred and sleek, on roofs of amethyst
And eaves of ivory we wandered, while
A lotus-colored moon swung up the Nile,
And Memphis slumbered in a silver mist.

Oh, it was Heaven just to sit and be
Antiphonal beneath some royal room
Until, for all our sacredness, we heard
Loud hieroglyphic curses flowing free,
And marked a sandal hurtling through the gloom
Hot from the hand of Rameses the Third!

EVE

When that old Eden interview was ended,
And the two exiles on a shakedown lay
In outer darkness, Adam said his say,
Beyond a doubt, and tellingly defended
His course, and swore with many a bitter damn,
The French were right: always *cherchez la femme!*

While Eve, who'd garnered knowledge long before
The fall, and knew that man is simply human
And bound to blame his blunders on his woman,
Mused in the dark: "I'm glad I saved the core;
He's maddest when he's hungry. Bless his heart,
Tomorrow he shall taste an apple tart."

THIS SUNDAY, GOD FORGIVE ME, I STRUNG MY LUTE

—PEPYS, IN HIS DIARY

That day you'd kicked the dog and kissed the maid,
Ogled your neighbor's wife and plagued your own;
Then, because Beauty plucked your sleeve and prayed
One little melody for love alone,
Your temper into pious snivellings ran.

May God forgive you, Samuel, if He can!

TO A STARING INFANT IN A PERAMBULATOR

Child, I surrender, and hereby declare
Whatever 'tis you think I've done—I've done it:
Theft, arson, murder. You have laid bone-bare
My inmost reticence, and passed upon it.

I had some prideful secrets, and a pair
Of fond delusions, and a scheme or two,
But all have perished in that long, light blue
Appraisal, in that bleak, unblenching stare.

They call you "blessed innocent" and "lamb."
I'd rather meet the Sphinx and Sophocles,
The Delphian Sybil and Demosthenes
And Einstein, all together in one pram,
If so I might evade, in any wise,
The inquisition of your awful eyes.

Let scoffers doubt it if they will—
Too real a little chap he moved,
And ran and romped, and wagged and loved,
Not to be somewhere still.
Granted he did not have a soul,
There's surely some reward of merit
For having such a trustful spirit,
A friendship so heart-whole.

Of course he could not hope for heaven,
—He might not look on seraphim,—
But, somehow, I believe there's given
A place his Maker meant for him;
That if we saw with clearer eyes,
And deeper mysteries had learned,
His small brown form might be discerned
Safe in some humble paradise,

Perched, cheerful, in a cozy niche
(Most like his cherished window-seat,
Cushioned and comforting) from which

He gazes on the pleasant street,
A wise and watchful wrinkle wearing
While all the old-time folk go past;
And pricks a prideful ear, at last,
And, all ecstatic, sets abeat
A celebrating tail—keen hearing
The fall of dear familiar feet.

I cannot find it in my creed,
Yet very plain it seems to me
That, off, away at topmost speed,
Afire with hospitality,
He deems himself, and is, indeed,
The little dog he used to be.

LITTLE TOWN

O Little Town, for all the miles
That make 'twixt you and me,
Never an April morning smiles
But what I surely see

The old square lately graced with green,
The twittering amber eaves,
The long street latticed all the way
With pattern of light leaves;

And one that was my own sweet youth,
Bedecked in dimity
And rosy ribbons, tripping down
The gray stones daintily,—

A new-blown blossom in her hair,
A fresh song in her throat,
With little lilt of pure delight
For every other note.

O Little Town, shall I come back
Some perfect April day

(For all the years, for all the years),
And meet her in the way?

Nay, God forbid . . . lest my sweet youth—
Soft-singing as she came—
Might stop with dimpling courtesy
To pray the Stranger's name!

JIM

Jim dog is dead—they're saying so.
He's nicely boxed and left beneath
A rosebush. Suddenly I know
A large contempt for death.

Those gay bones resting calm and shriven,
Ashes of roses? Ten to one,
All up and down the hills of heaven
Rabbits are on the run!

I'll wager, if I died tonight
And, halting by the river's rim
A bit bewildered at my plight,
Should call, "Here, Jim! Here, Jim!"—

Yelping with glory, glad and rough,
He'd hurtle down the other side,
And soon I'd feel a warm, wet scruff
Towing me through the tide.

THE CHARM

His gray godmother made a reckless vow:
"He never shall grow old!" Then magic-wise
She kindled an elfin laughter in his eyes
And bound a lad's staunch beauty on his brow.

Joy-christened in his cradle, all his days
He quirked a shoulder at the wishing-moon,
And carved a willow whistle for a tune,
And roamed his world by gay, unreckoned ways.

And when the way of all the earth he took,
'Twas gayly still, as if beside his bed
A little twinkling lady leaned and said,
"There're jolly meadows just beyond the brook!"

THE LITTLE HORSES

Last night a sweet dream came to me
When dark had sealed the eyes of men.
I thought I was a child again
  In our old nursery.
From the warm hearth the flickering fire
Made ruddy lights on everything,
Sent dusky shadows up the wall
  Like fairies frolicking;
And back and forward, to and fro,
In cradling arms rocked very slow,
I heard a soft voice chanting low
  The song it used to sing:
"Go to sleep, you shall ride
  The little horses gay,
The black and brown, the gray and roan,
  The sorrel and the bay!"

It was a dream within a dream,
For, sudden from the twinkling flame,
Charging, their tiny flanks agleam,
  The little horses came,

Their slim hoofs shod with silver shoes,
A light wind tossing tail and mane,
A saddle on each satin back,
A rosette on each rein—
Red for the black, green for the gray,
Blue for the sorrel and the bay—
And stirrups swung in wondrous way,
With still the old refrain:
"Go to sleep, you shall ride
The little horses gay,
The black and brown, the gray and roan,
The sorrel and the bay!"

I waked. The nursery was gone,
The shadows and the rosy light;
Against my window, chilly white,
Glimmered the solemn dawn.
But I could smile, remembering
How all the little horses fleet
Raced down the rosy air to me
On bright-shod, flying feet:
The whinnying black, the gallant bay,

The splendid sorrel and the gray,
Their gallop tuned, in magic way,
To the old song sung sweet:
"Go to sleep, you shall ride
The little horses gay,
The black and brown, the gray and roan,
The sorrel and the bay!"

EPITAPHS
FROM A COUNTRY DOORYARD

A RABBIT

God wrought him well, of silk and tempered steel,
Amber and ivory, and shod his heel
With wind, and gave him wit to understand
Lore of the wood and wisdom of the land.

"Ashes to ashes" for mortals, "Dust to dust."
These bones lie light beneath a pastry crust.

A GOLDFISH

Here lies a ne'er-do-well who spent his days
Idling and ogling in a public place.
Now, with the rimless universe his bowl,
He finds a whale-sized job and saves his soul.

A MONGREL PUP

Here lies at rest, unknown to fame,
Of dark descent and doubtful name,
One Binks. Here lie his treasures, too—
A ball, a bone, a worried shoe.

Nay, stranger, shed no idle tears:
He loved one small lad all his years.

He practiced, with a calm the saints might prize,
Faith—that he would receive his daily flies;
Hope—for a share in common garden joys,
And charity even toward small tormenting boys.

But for a little slip in Nature's plan,
Here would be lying a Christian gentleman.

She perished amid the ruins of her home.
Within the length and breadth of Kingdom Come,
May she discern some scant, unwanted space,
And there rebuild her small abiding-place.

If he remembers half his bitter wrongs:
The short arc of his flight, the silenced songs,
How earth denied him love, and mate, and nest,
Wind in his feathers, bough beneath his breast—
He may not tarry with the heavenly host.

Then God defend us from his little ghost!

Once, homespun clad, he tumbled over
Timothy, barley, common clover.

Now, jasper-winged and burnished well,
He hops in fields of asphodel—

Too plain and simple-hearted even
To know he's dead and gone to Heaven.

Since naught can perish, then the common dust
Herewith receives a strange and shining trust.
Only the ancient earth knows into what
New loveliness this fabric will be wrought.

Whether or not there's Heaven for feathered folk,
This brother, (though he never saw the light),
Counts on a seat in some celestial oak,
And waits unruffled his resurrection night.

Though piteous weak and frail he was,
His Maker bent to see him pass,
And marked his hour. So he lies
In holy grass.

Here sleeps at last—and well he earned his leisure—
A miser, given to hoarding yellow treasure,
A pirate, oft with riches in his hold,
A wizard, turning all he touched to gold.
So deft, industrious, and clever he—
We could have better spared a better bee.

V

A CYCLE OF ENGLAND

RETURN

I

I sometimes wonder, must I live and die
And never look on England? All my days
My spirit has been aware of all her ways:
The amethyst line that London writes awry
At evening on a saffron April sky;
The sea fog, silver-wrought on burnished flowers,
The sea wind, desolate among old towers
On haunted nights; the first lark's lifting cry.

I know the very way the Channel tide
Comes up on Cornwall; how the slow dusks fall;
How Devon lanes are lovely with the breath
Of autumn roses . . . Nay, while these abide,
What can avail to hinder me at all
From my desire? Not life, I think—or death.

II

If there be any curve to destiny
The arc rounds to a circle, soon or late.
Some twilight, through my little garden gate,
Down many a long and dusty century

I shall go faring, undeterred and free;
I shall go hastening, ages overdue,
Back to the boundaries whence my being drew,
With all the crumpled road unflung for me;

And passing Mayfair in the morning watch,
Or skirting Tower Hill or Hampstead moor,
Shall follow dim, familiar streets, and try
Gray courts, and halt at last with hand to latch,
Knowing it for no dream, at some old door,
And say, *This is the place, and this is I.*

BELLS

Long ago and long ago I ran across a story,
Such a little quirky tale! I loved it, every line:
Richard with his trusty cat traipsing up to London,
Halting at the crossway post to read the crooked sign;
Amber eye and velvet ear crumpled on his shoulder,
Brambles in his shabby clothes, doubting—should he dare?
Troubled, facing home again, all his castles tumbled,—then
Bow Bells crying sudden sweet, like angels in the air:

Turn again, Whittington,
Lord Mayor of London!
Look again, the miles are long,
But see the spires burn!
Try again, the towers shine!
(Prickles tingling up my spine,
Heart in mouth, Dick Whittington,
For fear you wouldn't turn!)

Lord Mayor of London, the dusty road you traveled
Stretches straight and level now, paved with proper stones;
The ruffled coat they dressed you in has long ago unraveled,
And all the tides of Temple Bar go loud above your bones.
Amber Eye is ash-of-fur; they lodged him near the larder;
He died of stuffing pastry tarts and lapping yellow cream;
Bow Bells' loud and lusty din has shouted many mayors in,
But still I hear their challenge flung across the hills of dream:

Turn again, Whittington,
Lord Mayor of London!
Chanting through the deepest dusk,
They ring your bright renown. . . .
And though my steps were stumbling back,
I laugh, and buckle on my pack,
And turn again and take again
The road to London Town!

HERITAGE

My mother's great-grandmother
A lass from Devon came;
Her little body is dust so long,
I've nigh forgotten her name.

Her wistful legend only
Has stood the wrack of years:
How always at the summer's flood
Her laughter broke to tears;

She'd blunder with her baking,
Her stitches ran uneven;
She'd droop above her churn and sigh,
"Ah me, it's June in Devon!"

It made a family byword
Long after she was dead;
"As fine as June in Devonshire,"
Her children's children said.

Across the world I journeyed
One year, as summer came,

And stumbled on her little heart
Who had forgotten her name,

And found beyond refuting
What made that crooked seam,
What burned the biscuits in their prime,
And spoiled the mellow cream.

Oh, little great-grandmother,
The dream that bound your brow
Has touch my own unwitting eyes—
It's June in Devon now!

OUTBOUND

The black sea parts to let us pass,
The harbor lights are gone;
A thousand nameless stars wheel up
Between the dusk and dawn.
We're outbound for England,
Our furrow flinging wide;
A thrusting wind is at our side,
And the long wave lifts us on.

My feet upon the forward deck
Have worn the very seams.
(And shall I know the Devon coast
When some red morning streams?)
All night my watches follow
The bells that break the dark—
(And will the Cornish cliffs stand stark
As they have stood in dreams?)

One star burns on above the mast
While twenty million roam.
A moorland wind will make at last
Across the bitter foam,

An old rack of headland
Come shouldering at the prow. . . .
I know they hear in Surrey now
My heart's blood beating home!

GOING UP TO LONDON

"As I went up to London,"
I heard a stranger say—
Going up to London
In such a casual way!
He turned the magic phrase
That has haunted all my days
As though it were a common thing
For careless lips to say.
As he went up to London!
I'll wager many a crown
He never saw the road that I
Shall take to London town.

When I go up to London
'Twill be in April weather.
I'll have a riband on my rein
And flaunt a scarlet feather;
The broom will toss its brush for me;
Two blackbirds and a thrush will be
Assembled in a bush for me
And sing a song together.

And all the blossomy hedgerows
Will shake their hawthorn down
As I go riding, riding
Up to London town.

Halting on a tall hill
Pied with purple flowers,
Twenty turrets I shall count,
And twice as many towers;
Count them on my finger-tips
As I used to do,
And half a hundred spires
Pricking toward the blue.
There will be a glass dome,
And a roof of gold,
And a latticed window high
Tilting toward the western sky,
As I knew of old.
London, London,
They counted me a fool—
I could draw your skyline plain
Before I went to school!

Riding, riding downward
By many a silver ridge
And many a slope of amethyst,
I'll come to London Bridge—
London Bridge flung wide for me,
Horses drawn aside for me,
Thames my ancient looking-glass
As I proudly pass;
Lords and flunkies, dukes and dames,
Country folk with comely names
Wondering at my steadfast face,
Beggars curtsying,
Footmen falling back a space;—
I would scarcely stay my pace
If I met the King!
If I met the King himself
He'd smile beneath his frown;
"Who is this comes travelling up
So light to London town?"

Riding, riding eagerly,
Thrusting through the throng,

(Travelling light, Your Majesty,
Because the way was long),
I'll hurry fast to London gate,
(The way was long, and I am late),
I'll come at last to London gate,
Singing me a song—
Some old rhyme of golden time
When wondrous things befell.
And there the boys and girls at play,
Understanding well,
Quick will hail me, clear and sweet,
Crowding, crowding after;
Every little crooked street
Will echo to their laughter;
Lilting, as they mark my look,
Chanting, two and two,
Dreamed it, dreamed it in a dream
And waked and found it true!

Sing, you rhymes, and ring, you chimes,
And swing, you bells of Bow!
When I go up to London
All the world shall know!

THE HOUSEHOLDER

There was a lark in Devonshire;
He waked one day at dawn
And found a yellow clover
With bright dew brimming over
Upon his little lawn.

The dew was clear as honey;
'Twas more than heart could bear:
With all his breast a tumult
He scaled a far-flung stair—
Up, story after story,
With "Glory, glory, glory!"
To gain a golden turret
High up the crystal air.

So glad his alleluias
That drowsy farmer folk
Slow blinking in the mist beneath
Half dreamed an angel spoke;
So loud his jubilates
That all the folk of heaven

Heard how a tuft of meadow grass
Was shining down in Devon.

Far, sweet and solitary,
Rejoicing, lost and fair,
He leaned from latticed sunlight
And turned one pure note slowly,
Then, dropping down the circled stair
Of amethyst and amber air,
Came crying, "Holy, holy!"
Still telling all the wondrous worth,
The marvel, over and over,
Of one square foot of English earth
And one new English clover!

AT TINTAGEL

Men dreamed a dauntless dream on this old shore,
Well worth the years' remembering, but today
Among gaunt ruins the ageless wind makes way,
A querulous ghost, from door to crumbling door.
Old desolation, now, old dust, old scars,
And one old whisper grieving, "So they passed,
So, blind with bright desire, they failed at last,
As all things fail and perish beneath the stars."

Nay, not while Arthur's England fronts the sea
They fail!—not while this chalice in the hills
At every dark with wine of mystery,
At every dawn with brimming beauty, fills!
Their dust blows deep where Galahad's vision
gleamed. . . .
Somewhere they wake and know how well they dreamed.

AT STONEHENGE

Dusk in that place was more than heart could bear.
The great stones, black and stark,
Stood limned against the inexorable dark:
The broken temple seemed
Symbol of all vain dreams that men have dreamed,
The kingdom and the glory and the power
Come to their ultimate hour.

Then suddenly the silence was astir:
Swiftly, as at his urgent heart's behest,
Uprose a worshipper,
A lonely skylark chanting in the gloom
Among old altars and old aisles of doom.

The first dew on his breast,
And on his wing the late light from the west,
He rose exultant, crying in one breath
His love of life, his disbelief in death,
His certain, changeless faith—
And, flinging praise afar,
Clomb high a circled stairway toward a star.

A PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE

One cannot walk in Lynmouth
Along the tilted street,
Because the Lyn comes leaping there
Impetuous, swift, and sweet,

With fleck of light and shadow
On flowered window-sills
And gossip under kitchen doors
About the Devon hills.

The crimson cottage roses
Hang drenched above its rim.
God send you see the Lyn come down
Before your eyes grow dim!

One cannot lie in Lynmouth
But, dusk to dawn, he hears
As clear as bells along his blood
The beat of old, old years—

Lyn water crying "England,"
Forever on and on. . . .
God let you sleep in Lynmouth once
Before your dreams are done!

GOING DOWN TO PORLOCK

As we went down to Porlock,
All in the autumn weather,
Beads were on the brier bush,
Pearls were on the heather.

How the hill was tilted!
How the rain was rife!
We met a misty donkey
Twice as large as life;

We passed a giant graybeard
With fog upon his face.
How far, how far to Porlock?
"O ay, there's such a place."

The mist was on our lashes,
The chill was in our breath;
We seemed to trudge forever
With nothing underneath.

So far, so far to Porlock!
There's never such a town!

Still fretting in the grayness
We stumbled down and down.

Then—sharp the shadow lifted,
The gloom went breaking by,
And there lay little Porlock,
With every doorstep dry,

With posies in the gardens
And roses on the walls,
And pleasant people nodding
In pinafores and shawls.

O I would climb to top o' the world
And trudge the whole way down,
For sake of coming sudden again
On little Porlock town!

CLOVELLY

Clovelly clings above the sea
Deep in a cleft of happy Devon,
Where wind and water moving free
Make music, seven days in seven.
Long wind and light wind,
Full tide and slack;
Though I am half a world away
That old song sings me back.

One tilted Street Clovelly owns
That halts at every open door,
With flowers among the cobblestones
And firelight on each dusky floor.
There's port there and peace there
Whatever season come.
If I had reached the world's last edge
That dream would draw me home.

VI

ROOFTREE

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAY

This day a year ago, to me
Was just a day in February,
A little drab day like a leaf
That wind and rain have put to grief,
No whit beyond the ordinary.

"A puritan is February,"
I used to think. "She does her duty,
But O, she is so primly chary
With light and beauty!

This year I feel a different way,
Time, meanwhile, having told to me
This is the little special day
When you began to be;

A day that's like a daffodil
Alight upon a wintry hill,
More lovely even to remember
Than any joy of petalled June
Or summer-sweet September.

It simply shows a shining thing
My heart had heretofore been blind to—
What February *can* do when
She has a mind to!

TO AN ORGAN GRINDER IN SPRING

I had forgotten April!
Why, with a foolish tune,
Have you sent her over my doorstep
In her little dancing shoon,

With her windy gossamer garments
Green as a maple leaf,
And her quick, delighted laughter
Stirring my old, old grief?

I had forgotten April!
Why, with the road so plain,
Should you halt at one dim doorway
To break a heart again?

HERMIT-THRUSH

Dusk on the solemn river, faint and chill,
Wan dusk and solitude
In the dumb wood;
The day's whole store of light and color spent.
Oh, hush, be still!
Listen! what is that melody unpent
Beyond the darkened hill,
Outpoured upon the edge of desolate night
In sudden ecstasy?—
A clear chord broken with beauty, then a lift
Of rapture, . . . then a precious note adrift
On the sheer silence; sadness and delight,
Joy and old pain, pure peace and memory,
And all the lonely loveliness of earth
In one ineffable cry;
Tears, and deep tenderness, and dreams men cherish,
And, in the same sweet breath,
Courage high-flung—the certain, soaring faith
That love can never fail nor beauty perish
Through chance or change or death.

Sing on, O hidden bird!
The river darkens and the shadows grow.
O lone voice crying in the wilderness,
Cry yet again, again—exquisite, slow,
That perfect word
Our hearts had ached to utter and did not know.

THE VISITOR

He came to my little house in the wood,
Sudden a shadow was on the floor,
A stir in the flowers—and there he stood,
Looking in at the door.

He shared for an hour my small hearth's cheer,
Tall and dusty and shabbily clad,
Chin of a soldier, eyes of a seer,
Mouth of a little lad.

I made some toast and I brewed some tea;
We sat and talked by the last red ember.
What I said to him, what he said to me,
I never could remember.

But sudden into his eyes there came
A look of listening, as though he heard
Something afar off naming a name,
Something calling a word.

And whether he caught a hilltop hail,
Or the silver sound of a bugle blowing,

Or a bell note over a misty vale,
Is ever past my knowing.

He snatched an apple, he threw me a kiss,
He blessed my roof with a sign, and then
He was off and away. And from that to this
I have never seen him again.

And now—and now—when the flowers sigh
And a sudden shadow is on the floor . . .
It is only a bird wing slanting by,
Or a little wind at the door.

The stable roof was slant and mean,
The rushes on the floor spread thin;
There was no fire to warm him by
When the little Christ came in.
There was no fire to warm him by,
They laid him in the prickly straw;
The humble, witless oxen saw
How helpless he did lie.

So helpless, and the stall so dim!
And yet, so near, the darkness riven
Of an archangel chanting him
With cherubim and seraphim:
"Glory to God in Heaven!"

His tiny whimper brake above
The patient sound of Mary's sigh;
The drowsy cattle stirred to hear
The little Christ's low cry.
The silent cattle heard him weep.
And waked, and lifted gentle heads;

Careless, nearby, on dreamful beds,
The inn-folk were asleep.

While, to their rocking camels bent,
Three dared the desert from afar,
One clear light in their firmament,
One cry among them as they went—
"The Star, the Star, the Star!"

CLICK O' THE LATCH

The silence holds for it, taut and true;
The young moon stays for it, wistful white;
Winds that whimpered the sunset through
Sigh for it, low and light:

Click o' the latch, and he'll come home,—
A stir in the dusk at the little gate.
Hush, my heart, and be still, my heart,—
Surely it's sweet to wait!

The tall skies lean for it, listening—
Never a star but lends an ear—
The clustering porch-flowers press and cling,
Parting their leaves to hear:

Click o' the latch, and him come home,—
A step on the flags, a snatch of song.
Hurry, my heart, be swift, my heart,—
How did we wait so long!

WHY?

Once, on a common day,
I found in the dip of a dell
A gold cup and a green plume
And a carved coral bell;
The air was honey clear;
A bee bowed on a clover;
A bird upon a blossomy bough
Gave one call over and over.

A hill stood north and west,
A thicket east and south;
A brook went by with a leaf on its breast
And a silver flute in its mouth;
There was dew on the rim of the cup,
And a sheen on the frondy feather;
A wind fluttered the coral bell—
They all chimed together.

The song that the water made
It had made for a thousand years;
There was old moss on the blossomy bough;
My eyes were full of tears.

Why should a mortal weep
  In a hollow under a hill
For a slim fern and a robin's cry
  And a yellow daffodil?

THE SUMMONS

I want to go back to a place my heart remembers,
An old square house on the top of a sentinel hill
Where slow Time loiters along however it will—
Blue Junes and gray Novembers.

There spring returns with the music of whippoorwills
calling
And sudden violets where a slope is green
And smoke adrift on a south wind spicy and keen
When the slow, damp dusk is falling.

There autumn comes with a click of frost in the night,
And a hickory log and a lump of lightwood pine
Flame on the hearth and set the gloom ashine
With a riot of ruddy light.

An unkempt, ragged old guardian wall incloses
An arbor purple with grapes and a lone pear tree,
And borders of mignonette and savory,
And ranks of crimson roses.

There's a stream near by, where mellow-bugs dart and
skip,
That chuckles aloud and talks in cheery tones
And brims a cool deep basin among the stones
Where dusty feet can dip.

The doors stand wide in the tranquil house on the hill,
And the wind walks down the hall and stirs a curtain—
The wind or a spirit, never I could be certain—
And the rooms are sweet and still.

Ripe acorns rain on the roof, a fairy din,
And wake me deep in the nighttime over and over;
At many a dawn a cow gets into the clover
And rings the sunrise in.

A curly path through a field, a sagging rail,
A hole in a hedge, a mark on a sassafras tree—
The way that my childhood went is blazed for me
In signs that cannot fail.

Nothing will hush this crying, whether or no!
My heart is fain for the miracle it remembers,

The beauty of old sweet Aprils and Septembers;
I cannot choose but go.

The long highways of the world are seven times seven;
Though a man should travel them all from shore to
shore
And yet at the last find one old trail no more,
He has missed the road to heaven.

I will turn my back on the noisy markets of men.
O roses, wait in the sun by the garden wall;
O Angel, touch the curtains in the hall—
I am coming home again!

Touch them!—they are not dreams or miracles,
Only, the turning tide of dark, withdrawn,
Has left a thousand, delicate dappled shells
Along the shores of dawn.

AN OLD GARDENER

His little world's foursquare and flat,
And Peter lets it go at that,
    Unbothered by geography.
His sun does move the livelong day
Above his world: no more to say.
Little he recks, and less cares he
    For uses of astronomy.

He lives and moves and has his place
    Among an immemorial race,
The smallest peoples of the earth,
And knows full well their passing worth,
And cons their humble histories
And all their lore can understand,
Holding their little destinies
Within the hollow of his hand.

No pride in Peter, no pretense;
He would not flout a fern, nor choose,
For all his power, to abuse
A common daisy's confidence.

The shy forget-me-nots adore him,
The lilies lay their plans before him;
He knows the secret ways of pinks
And treasures what a dahlia thinks;
He has the wit to walk discreetly
Where heliotropes are whispering sweetly,
And very reverently goes
Into the presence of a rose.

With cogitating frown he moves
Among the company he loves;
Lingers to brush away the traces
Of summer dust from pansy faces;
Untwines a tendril curled too tight
And sets a bashful bud aright;
Enumerates with worried eyes
A cutworm's black iniquities;
Straightens a crumpled leaf, and breaks
A border for the tulips' sakes;
Then halts to bend, heart-stricken, where
An ailing violet asks his care,
And broods with wisdom and distress
Above its trustful helplessness.

I hope when this old earth of ours
Has burned to ash with all its flowers,
That somehow in the other land
The Angel Folk will understand,
Will grant old Peter of their grace
Some sort of little garden space.
So, haply, if we seek him well,
We'll find him pottering cheerfully,
As happy as he used to be,
Amid the fields of asphodel—
Content and careful, calm and shriven,
Among the flower-folk of Heaven.

REMINDER

It isn't song or sound
That wakens old regrets
And bids the heart remember—
It's some familiar scent re-found,
Like breath of April violets
Or apples of September.

It isn't look or sign
That stirs across the years
And shakes the heart again—
It's brush smoke sharp with burning pine,
Or that old fragrance, keen as tears,
Of plowed earth after rain.

THE LITTLE ROAD

A Little Road was straying
Across a little hill.
I asked, "May I go with you, road?"
It answered, "If you will."

'Twas travel-stained and shabby,
And dust was on its face.
Said I: "How fine to wander free
To every lovely place!

"Oh, if you're off to mountains,
Or if you're off to sea,
Or if you're bound across the world,
It's all the same to me!"

We loitered in the sunlight,
We journeyed on together;
The sky was like a bluebird's wing,
The wind was like a feather.

We passed a ruddy robin,
Who called, "How do you do?"

Some daisies shook their bonnets back
And begged, "Ah, take us, too!"

A squirrel briefly joined us,
A brook came hurrying down;
We wandered through a meadow green
And by a busy town.

* * * * *

When dusky twilight met us,
No feet so slow as mine.
"Why, there's a little house," I said,
"With windows all ashine.

"Perhaps, since night is nearing,
I'd rather rest than roam."
"I knew you would," said Little Road;
"That's why I brought you home."

WISH

I want to have a little house
  With sunlight on the floor,
A chimney with a rosy hearth,
  And lilacs by the door;

With windows looking east and west,
  And a crooked apple tree,
And room beside the garden fence
  For hollyhocks to be.

Oh, all my life I've wandered round,
  But the heart is quick at knowing
Its own roof and its own bush
  And its own boughs blowing;

And when I find that little house—
  At noon or dusk or dawn—
I'll walk right in and light the fire
  And put the kettle on!

WILD GEESE

Hark, that is more than wild geese going south—
That cry from a cloud at an autumn sunset's edge,
As keen as the word in a lonely prophet's mouth!
It is promise and pledge!

They will return; they will startle the old earth's grieving
With clear, sweet clamor, prevailing on and on;
And they will be more than a wedge of wild birds cleaving
Home through an April dawn.

Never that cry, that challenge flinging free
But I come to my feet with a hail, laughing at death,
On a sudden as sure of immortality
As I am of my blood and breath!

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